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New Plans Foresee Fighting Terrorism Beyond War Zones

Pentagon to Rely on Special Operations

By Ann Scott Tyson
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Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has approved the military's most ambitious plan yet to fight terrorism around the world and retaliate more rapidly and decisively in the case of another major terrorist attack on the United States, according to defense officials.

The long-awaited campaign plan for the global war on terrorism, as well as two subordinate plans also approved within the past month by Rumsfeld, are considered the Pentagon's highest priority, according to officials familiar with the three documents who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about them publicly.

Details of the plans are secret, but in general they envision a significantly expanded role for the military -- and, in particular, a growing force of elite Special Operations troops -- in continuous operations to combat terrorism outside of war zones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Developed over about three years by the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) in Tampa, the plans reflect a beefing up of the Pentagon's involvement in domains traditionally handled by the Central Intelligence Agency and the State Department.

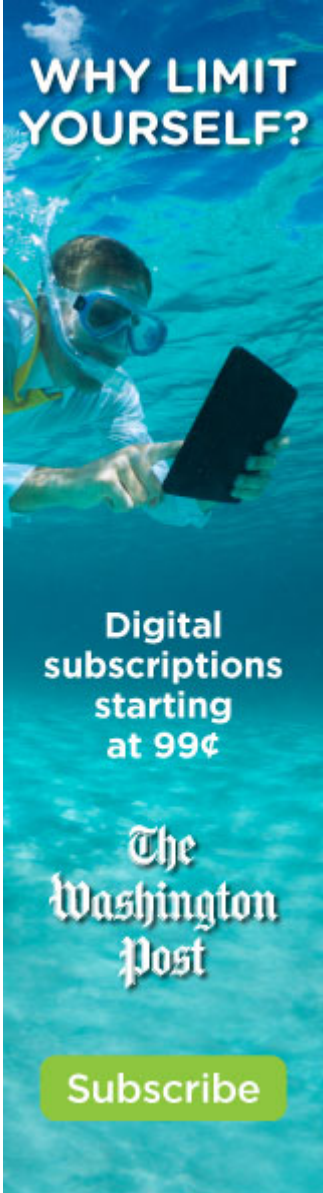
For example, SOCOM has dispatched small teams of Army Green Berets and other Special Operations troops to U.S. embassies in about 20 countries in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Latin America, where they do operational planning and intelligence gathering to enhance the ability to conduct military operations where the United States is not at war.

And in a subtle but important shift contained in a classified order last year, the Pentagon gained the leeway to inform -- rather than gain the approval of -- the U.S. ambassador before conducting military operations in a foreign country, according to several administration officials. "We do not need ambassador-level approval," said one defense official familiar with the order.

Overall, the plans underscore Rumsfeld's conviction since the September 2001 terrorist attacks that the U.S. military must expand its mission beyond 20th-century conventional warfare by infantry, tanks, ships and fighter jets to fighting non-state groups that are, above all, difficult to find.

The plans each run more than 100 pages and cover a wide range of overt and clandestine military activities -- such as man-hunting and intelligence gathering on terrorist networks; attacks on terrorist training camps and recruiting efforts; and partnering with foreign militaries to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries. Together, they amount to an assignment of responsibilities to different military commands to conduct what the Pentagon envisions as a "long war" against terrorism.

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The main campaign plan sets priorities, allocates resources such as manpower and funding, and coordinates operations among regional military commands to implement the Pentagon's broader National Military Strategic Plan for the War on Terrorism, published in unclassified form in February. It lays out nine key goals, such as targeting terrorist leaders, safe havens, communications and other logistical support, and countering extremist ideology.

A second detailed plan is focused specifically on al-Qaeda and associated movements, including more than a dozen groups spread across the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Africa. Such groups include the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Ansar al-Islam in the Middle East, Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia, and the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat in Saharan Africa.

A third plan sets out how the military can both disrupt and respond to another major terrorist strike on the United States. It includes lengthy annexes that offer a menu of options for the military to retaliate quickly against specific terrorist groups, individuals or state sponsors depending on who is believed to be behind an attack. Another attack could create both a justification and an opportunity that is lacking today to retaliate against some known targets, according to current and former defense officials familiar with the plan.

This plan details "what terrorists or bad guys we would hit if the gloves came off. The gloves are not off," said one official, who asked not to be identified because of the sensitivity of the subject.

The Pentagon declined to comment on the counterterrorism plans or their approval, citing longstanding policy. "We do not discuss contingency plans or future operations," said Cmdr. Greg Hicks, a Defense Department spokesman. SOCOM's deputy commander, Vice Adm. Eric T. Olson, said earlier this month in Senate testimony that the plans had been approved.

Special Operations Command, led by Gen. Doug Brown, has been building up its headquarters and writing the plans since 2003, when Rumsfeld first designated it as the lead command for the war on terrorism. Its budget has grown 60 percent since 2003 to \$8 billion in fiscal 2007. President Bush empowered the 53,000-strong command with coordinating the entire military's efforts in counterterrorism in 2004.

"SOCOM is, in fact, in charge of the global war on terror," Brown said in testimony before the House last month. In this role, SOCOM directs and coordinates actions by the military's regional combatant commands. SOCOM, if directed, can also command its own counterterrorist operations -- such as when a threat spans regional boundaries or the mission is highly sensitive -- but it has not done so yet, according to Olson, and other officials say that is likely to be the exception to the rule.

To extend its reach to more countries, SOCOM is increasing by 13,000 the number of Special Operations troops, including Special Forces soldiers skilled in language and working with indigenous militaries, and Delta Force operatives and Navy SEAL teams that form clandestine "special mission units" engaged in reconnaissance, intelligence gathering and man-hunting. Already, SOCOM is seeing its biggest deployments in history, with 7,000 troops overseas today, but the majority have been concentrated in Iraq and Afghanistan, with 85 percent last year in the Middle East, Central Asia or the Horn of Africa.

But SOCOM's more robust role -- while adding manpower, specialized skills and organization to the fight against terrorism -- has also led to some bureaucratic tensions, both inside the military with the joint staff and regional commands, as well as with the CIA and State Department. Such tensions are one reason SOCOM's plan took years.

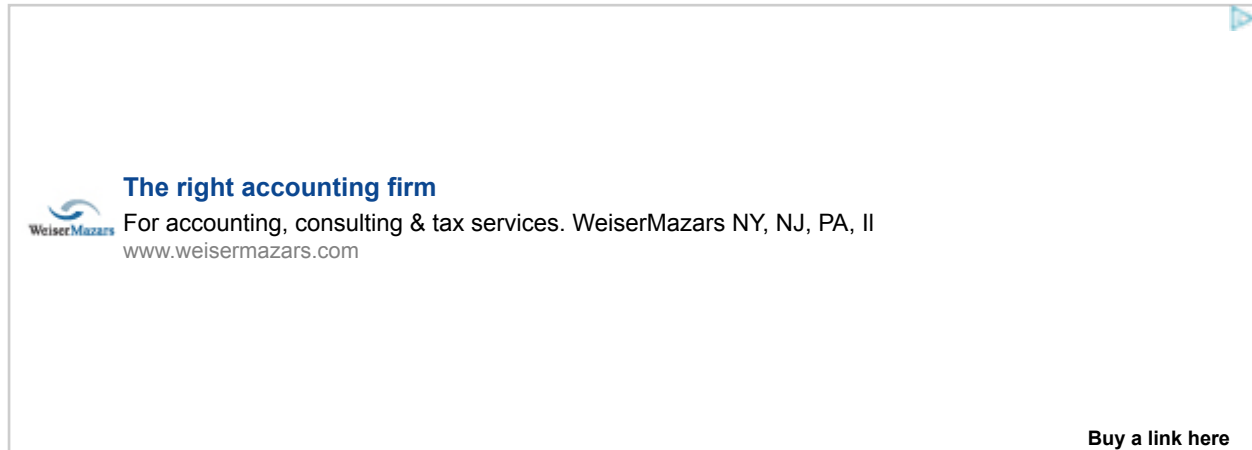
When SOCOM first dispatched military liaison teams abroad starting in 2003, they were called "Operational Control Elements," a term changed last year because "it raised the hackles of regional

commanders and ambassadors. It was a bad choice of language," said one defense official, adding: "Who can pick on Military Liaison Elements?"

State Department officials, meanwhile, said that although, for the most part, cooperation with the military teams has been good, they remain concerned over continued "gray areas" regarding their status. "Special Ops wants the flexibility and speed to go in there. . . . but there's understandably questions of how you do that and how you have clear lines of authority," one U.S. official said. There remains "continuing discussion, to put it politely, in terms of how this is going to work," the official said. SOCOM says the teams work for the regional commanders.

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